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ABSTRACT

One response to the shrinking budgets and increased demand for services that have become a way of life in higher education is the creation of partnerships with public and private agencies to share resources and costs. There is virtually an unlimited number of possible partnership arrangements. Off-campus training and degree programs represent one type, such as the college degree study programs established at local businesses by Kirkwood Community College (KCC), in Cedar Rapids, Iowa. Other partnerships may focus on economic development activities, such as an effort by St. Louis Community College, in Missouri, and McDonnell-Douglas to offer individualized skills testing and assessment to displaced workers in the aerospace industry. A third type of partnership involves sharing facilities with public agencies. For example, the KCC campus is home to the East Central Iowa Council of Government and the Heritage Center on Aging, while Central Alabama Community College will manage a conference center and historical village donated by the Kimberly-Clark Corporation. Another arrangement involves housing business facilities on the college campus as is done at the Maricopa Community Colleges, in Arizona, where college officials share offices with personnel from the Motorola Corporation. Finally, other partnerships involve community colleges working together in national networks to share information, professional development, and educational programming. Partnerships are most successful when the colleges have strong transfer, vocational, and community education programming, and when they have credibility within the community. (BCY)

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PARTNERSHIPS: DOORS TO THE FUTURE FOR COMMUNITY COLLEGES

Norman R. Nielsen

Budgets shrivel and shrink. State support drops. The public demands more programs and services. The business community wants more vocational programs. The community college is forced to downsize, postpone plant maintenance, and set aside plans for new programs. Details may differ and regional economic conditions determine when the struggles began, but the story is virtually the same nationwide.

The "easy out" for community colleges at this point is to behave as individuals and families seem to do when they are hit by financial challenges: they keep quiet, cut back on their lifestyles, and suffer together, hoping that, with luck, things will get better.

Operating in Partnerships as a Way of Life

It is time to develop a different attitude. First, community colleges must admit that this is not a short-term crisis. Financial challenges and shrinking support have become a way of life for all of higher education. Demands are great and resources are limited. There is no reason to believe that a reviving economy will change that in the near future.

Kirkwood Community College conducted an institutional effectiveness study in 1990-91. One of the conclusions that this college reached, like many others in similar circumstances, was to emphasize strong partnerships with both public and private agencies to meet the growing challenge of the nineties.

Based on the results from implementing this recommendation over the past several years, Kirkwood makes this recommendation: Find some friends. Call those friends partners. Then find more friends. Build partnerships while addressing the important needs in the community. Show those partners how useful the community college can be to them. Ask partners to support the college both financially and organizationally.

Exploring the Full Range of Partnerships: Public and Private

When approaching partnerships, avoid the tendency to equate "partners" with "funders." While many partnerships involve a contribution of money to the college, those that entail an exchange of expertise, personnel, facilities, or other resources can be equally fruitful. A handful of examples of the virtually unlimited varieties of partnership arrangements is listed below:

Off-Campus Training and Degree Programs. One of the earliest partnerships at Kirkwood Community College was the establishment of college degree study programs at two large local businesses. Employees of IES Industries and AEGON USA can earn associate degrees through classes held on-site.

Perhaps even more popular are the extensive non-credit educational offerings community colleges bring to local employers, particularly in the area of workplace literacy. One such instance is Central Piedmont Community College, NC, which brings both live instructors and computer-based educational courseware to area textile industries to improve employees' reading, writing, and math skills.

On-site educational programs are not restricted to business facilities, however. Northern Virginia Community College, VA, offers courses at several military bases within its district, as well as at the Pentagon. Monroe Community College, NY, located adjacent to a county jail, has a 150-hour non credit food service certificate program taught using the prison kitchens and chefs, providing students with skills for employment and/or for completion of the college's credit degree program in food, hotel, and tourism, once they are released from jail.

Economic Development Activities. City, county, and industrial agencies are increasingly turning to community colleges for a variety of services to foster economic development in the community. For instance, Kirkwood Community College is joining with other community agencies to open a one-stop site for career testing, assessment, counseling, academic advising, and placement services. St. Louis Community College, MO, is working with McDonnell-Douglas to offer individualized skills testing/assessment and new career development plans for displaced workers in the aerospace industry.

Northampton Community College, PA, is collaborating with its area Industrial Development Center and the Northeast Tier Ben Franklin Center to develop and nurture the supplier network necessary to support revitalized textile machine tool and plastic industries,

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while Shelton State Community College, AL, is helping the Mercedes-Benz plant moving to its district to find office space and to screen over 25,000 applications for the 1,500 employees the company will hire.

Shared Facilities with Public Agencies. Since many community colleges receive much, if not most, of their funding from county, state, or other local funding sources, they should maximize ties to other public agencies. The Kirkwood Community College campus, for example, is home to the East Central Iowa Council of Government and the Heritage Agency on Aging. Similarly, Belleville Area College, IL, serves as the umbrella for an extensive county wide program for senior citizens that centralizes educational and personal development opportunities, wellness, housing, and job and volunteer opportunities on the campus. This service draws more than 12,000 participants annually, and links hundreds of mature volunteers with dozens of public or non profit agencies across the community.

Central Alabama Community College, AL, will manage a multi-million dollar historical village and conference center donated by the Kimberly-Clark Corporation. This center will house a new statewide educational alliance called the Environmental Science Consortium, which will use the facilities as a training site for instructors of associate degree environmental programs; a natural resources laboratory for community groups such as 4-H and Future Farmers of America; and a historical learning center for elementary and secondary students.

Inviting Industry on Campus. Likewise, housing business facilities on campus can create a synergistic relationship between colleges and area employers. At the Maricopa Community Colleges, AZ, college officials share offices with personnel from Motorola Corporation, and use their industry perspective when planning educational programs. Motorola, for its part, has mandated a 70 hours per year continuing education requirement for all employees, and encourages workers to meet that obligation through relevant MCC classes.

Johnson County Community College, KS, is the site of the National Training Headquarters for Burlington-Northern Railroad. Burlington built a $3.5 million facility, complete with railroad simulator, on the campus, which will become JCCC's property after ten years of operation; B-NR occupies two-thirds of the building for its training activities, while the college uses the other third for general purpose classrooms. Burlington recently built a second $6 million building which will also revert to the college after a decade. JCCC, meanwhile, is developing an industry wide railroad personnel associate degree program.

At the Kirkwood Community College campus, AEGON USA is building a $10 million Corporate Data Center, which will not only handle its own data processing operations, but will provide KCC with a state-of-the-art computer training center.

National Community College Networking. Other important partnerships involve communityy colleges working together cooperatively to share information, professional development, and educational programming with each other.

Participation in the activities of organizations like the League for Innovation in the Community College Satellite Network, and the numerous specialized councils or consortia organized under the AACC umbrella, allows community colleges across the country to pool their expertise and resources to produce the maximum benefit for all. Such national community college partnerships will become increasingly critical as demands for diverse programming grow, driving all colleges to borrow from each other to fill the gaps they could not provide otherwise.

Criteria for a Strong Partnership Program

Experience demonstates that the key to successful partnerships is first having strong college transfer, vocational, and community education programming. Partnerships flourish when colleges have built credibility within their community by offering quality education programs, utilizing active advisory committees, building an outstanding faculty, and employing innovative outreach techniques. Working from this strong base, community colleges can more easily draw industries and public agencies into the network of partnerships.

Community colleges and higher education in general face a tremendous demand for responsive educational programs. But this pressure also provides the greatest opportunity for change and innovation in education since World War II. Community colleges are better positioned than any other sector of education to respond to these challenges because they are already closely tied to so many segments of their communities. These ties can be strengthened and mobilized to help colleges do the jobs for which they were created.

The successful experiences of Kirkwood and other community colleges demonstrate the power and value of partnerships. Aligning the activities of the college with the needs and goals of the community enhances the impact of the college's services. Partnerships are simply good business—and they work.

Norman R. Nielsen is president of Kirkwood Community College in Cedar Rapids, Iowa and member and past president of the board of directors of the League for Innovation in the Community College — Guest editor, Carol Cross.

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